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## AROUND THE AGENCIES

**PRIORITIZE THIS:** The system the Trump EPA put in place in 2018 to focus its work assessing the health dangers of toxic chemicals on the highest priority assessments has been confusing and counterproductive, according to a Government Accountability Office report slated for release today. Recall: That survey system implemented by EPA research chief David Dunlap effectively killed off a controversial assessment of formaldehyde that was poised to link the ubiquitous chemical with leukemia — a finding Dunlap had previously fought while working for Koch Industries, a major formaldehyde emitter.

**GAO found that Dunlap's system of surveying program offices** for their priorities for the Integrated Risk Information System, and requiring the politically appointed assistant administrators to sign off on them, has left staffers making "arbitrary decision[s]" about what chemicals to recommend, and, when their suggestions were dropped, unmotivated to participate again.

**Instructions were never given to staff** on what makes an assessment a high priority, GAO said, nor on how assistant administrators decide whether or not to sign off on their staff's requests. For instance, in 2019, one office submitted 26 recommendations for chemicals the IRIS program should assess, but the assistant administrator only signed off on one. And the narrowed priorities haven't resulted in faster progress on assessments; GAO found that since December 2018, no assessments have advanced to the next major step in the process. By the second year the survey system was in place, less than half of program offices even bothered to participate, GAO found.

**EPA says it has updated its survey program** and issued a memo since the GAO audit was conducted, but GAO said more specific guidance to staff is needed.

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